

**Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, August 10, 1815 ,  
from The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve  
Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul  
Leicester Ford.**

**TO JOHN ADAMS J. MSS.**

Monticello, August 10, 1815.

Dear Sir, —The simultaneous movements in our correspondence have been remarkable on several occasions. It would seem as if the state of the air, or state of the times, or some other unknown cause, produced a sympathetic effect on our mutual recollections. I had sat down to answer your letters of June the 19th, 20th and 22d, with pen, ink and paper before me, when I received from our mail that of July the 30th. You ask information on the subject of Camus. All I recollect of him is, that he was one of the deputies sent to arrest Dumourier at the head of his army, who were, however, themselves arrested by Dumourier, and long detained as prisoners. I presume, therefore, he was a Jacobin. You will find his character in the most excellent revolutionary history of Toulangeon. I believe, also, he may be the same person who has given us a translation of Aristotle's *Natural History*, from the Greek into French. Of his report to the National Institute on the subject of the Bollandists, your letter gives me the first information. I had supposed them defunct with the society of Jesuits, of which they were; and that their works, although above ground, were, from their bulk and insignificance, as effectually entombed on their shelves, as if in the graves of their authors. Fifty-two volumes in folio, of the *acta sanctorum*, in dog-Latin, would be a formidable enterprise to the most laborious German. I expect, with you, they are the most enormous mass of lies, frauds, hypocrisy and imposture, that was ever heaped together on this globe. By what chemical process M. Camus supposed that an extract of truth could

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be obtained from such a farrago of falsehood, I must leave to the chemists and moralists of the age to divine.

On the subject of the history of the American Revolution, you ask who shall write it? Who can write it? And who will ever be able to write it? Nobody; except merely its external

facts; all its councils, designs and discussions having been conducted by Congress with closed doors, and no members, as far as I know, having even made notes of them. These, which are the life and soul of history, must forever be unknown. Botta, as you observe, has put his own speculations and reasonings into the mouths of persons whom he names, but who, you and I know, never made such speeches. In this he has followed the example of the ancients, who made their great men deliver long speeches, all of them in the same style, and in that of the author himself. The work is nevertheless a good one, more judicious, more chaste, more classical, and more true than the party diatribe of Marshall. Its greatest fault is in having taken too much from him. I possessed the work, and often recurred to considerable portions of it, although I never read it through. But a very judicious and well-informed neighbor of mine went through it with great attention, and spoke very highly of it. I have said that no member of the old Congress, as far as I knew, made notes of the discussion. I did not know of the speeches you mention of Dickinson and Witherspoon. But on the questions of Independence, and on the two articles of Confederation respecting taxes and votings, I took minutes of the heads of the arguments. On the first, I threw all into one mass, without ascribing to the speakers their respective arguments; pretty much in the manner of Hume's summary digests of the reasonings in parliament for and against a measure. On the last, I stated the heads of the arguments used by each speaker. But the whole of my notes on the question of Independence does not occupy more than five pages, such as of this letter; and on the other questions, two such sheets. They have never been communicated to any one. Do you know that there exists in manuscript the ablest work of this kind ever yet

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executed, of the debates of the constitutional convention of Philadelphia in 1788? The whole of everything said and done there was taken down by Mr. Madison, with a labor and exactness beyond comprehension.

I presume that our correspondence has been observed at the post offices, and thus has attracted notice. Would you believe, that a printer has had the effrontery to propose to me the letting him publish it? These people think they have a right to everything, however secret or sacred. I had not before heard of the Boston pamphlet with Priestley's letters and mine.

At length Bonaparte has got on the right side of a question. From the time of his entering the legislative hall to his retreat to Elba, no man has execrated him more than myself. I will not except even the members of the Essex Junto; although for very different reasons; I, because he was warring against the liberty of his own country, and independence of others; they, because he was the enemy of England, the Pope, and the Inquisition. But at length, and as far as we can judge, he seems to have become the choice of his nation. At least, he is defending the cause of his nation, and that of all mankind, the rights of every people to independence and self-government. He and the allies have now changed sides. They are parcelling out among themselves Poland, Belgium, Saxony, Italy, dictating a ruler and government to France, and looking askance at our republic, the splendid libel on their governments, and he is fighting for the principles of national independence, of which his whole life hitherto has been a continued violation. He has promised a free government to his own country, and to respect the rights of others; and although his former conduct inspires little confidence in his promises, yet we had better take the chance of his word for doing right, than the certainty of the wrong which his adversaries are doing and avowing.

If they succeed, ours is only the boon of the Cyclops to Ulysses, of being the last devoured.

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Present me affectionately and respectfully to Mrs. Adams, and Heaven give you both as much more of life as you wish, and bless it with health and happiness.

P. S. August the 11th.—I had finished my letter yesterday, and this morning receive the news of Bonaparte's second abdication. Very well. For him personally, I have no feeling but reprobation. The representatives of the nation have deposed him. They have taken the allies at their word, that they had no object in the war but his removal. The nation is now free to give itself a good government, either with or without a Bourbon; and France unsubdued, will still be a bridle on the enterprises of the combined powers, and a bulwark to others.